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Mark Fafard

University of North Florida

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Next Year in Jerusalem: A 21st Century, Medieval Pilgrimage Site

Mark Fafard

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Ron Lukens-Bull,
Associate Professor of Anthropology

Abstract

American Protestantism is generally regarded as scripturalist and lacking in such features as Passion plays and pilgrimage. The Holy Land Experience is an Orlando based Christian attraction that includes characteristics of both modern and medieval pilgrimage sites. In addition to the publicized Christian theme, an underlying yet equal message of Jewish heritage is pronounced within several of the park's attributes. One dimension of this is that it serves as a substitutional pilgrimage; that is, an alternative to traveling to war torn Israel. This ethnography provides an emic perspective of the Holy Land Experience to hypothesize that it is a Christian pilgrimage site which promotes a positive standpoint of Jewish culture.

Introduction

The Holy Land Experience resembles other themed attractions in Orlando but is characterized by the reenactment of a number of biblical events including a daily performance of the Passion. The park also seeks to create a special reflection for its visitors to Judaism and to Israel. Edward Campo (1998) identifies three kinds of pilgrimage in the American landscape:

religious, civil, and cultural. Religious pilgrimages are generally less important and less common than civic ones to places like Mt. Rushmore, various monuments in the nation's capital, and cultural pilgrimages to Graceland, Disney World, and major bike rallies like Sturgis and Daytona (Bryant 2005). The limited number of religious pilgrimages is limited to minority groups such as Catholics, Mormons, and Hindus (Campo 1998:4). It can be rightly stated that American Protestantism has few if any pilgrimage traditions with the exception of major conferences, Christian music events at theme parks such as Jim and Tammy Faye Baker's Heritage Park USA (Belk and O'Guinn 1989). Beyond that, many churches and other groups have offered tours to either Rome or Israel but these take the pilgrimage out of the American context.

The Holy Land Experience is a branch of the Messianic-Jewish ministry titled "Zion's Hope". This site is a themed Orlando attraction geared toward providing and proclaiming evangelical idealism through recreation of an imagined Jerusalem. Through varieties of religious education, sacred geography, ideology, and passion dramas, the site not only serves as an Orlando theme park but also attracts those deeply concerned with furthering their Christian faith. For example, in an email sent to the Holy Land Experience, a visitor wrote about their experience at the site and the stressed the importance of Christian visitation to the site. The letter reads,

"I have told my church
family and all my
Christian friends about
this place and we are a
planning group trip...we
will continue to spread the

word about the Holy Land Experience to our friends so they can come and feel what we felt...Thank you for providing this wonderful experience for those who can't travel to Israel”.

In addition to the site's characteristics, there are certain messages designed for the visitor that include an evangelical centralized theme on Christ while providing an aggressive positive outlook on Jewish tradition. It is not uncommon for pilgrimage sites to commend doctrinal truths (Eliade 1958). Using the theories of Victor Turner to support the data collected on the Holy Land Experience, it is possible to reason that this site is a theme park of present day American pilgrimage characteristics with medieval traditional pilgrimage processes.

Beginning in January of 2004, an assortment of data has been collected, analyzed, and considered relevant through several methods, including a series of visits made to the site over a one- year time frame. Observational material was collected through approximately ten visits to the Holy Land Experience in order to study the daily events and conduct interviews. The total amount of time spent at the site was 70 hours. Utilized research strategies included: participation in museum tours, historic biblical seminars, ministry presentations, passion dramas, musical performances, and film productions. Additional data collection was by observation and interview material from the staff and guests. Contact remains in place through phone, email and postal mail. Publications such as the Jerusalem Gold Quarterly (a newsletter available to

annual members), Zion's Fire (a bi-monthly magazine published by the Zion's Hope ministry), daily schedule of events, Holy Land Experience related web sites, newsletters, various product advertisements, and brochures continue to be collected. Interviews were conducted primarily among seven staff members whose job positions ranged from snack stand operators and site managers to stage performers.

The observance of Jewish heritage present at the site is analyzed in conjunction with primary and secondary material on the Holy Land Experience. Attributes of the Jewish presence include staff members who use Hebrew stage names and inflection while at the Holy Land Experience, the recreation of festivals such as Hanukkah and Rosh Hashanah, and Hebrew prayers used in several of the presentations. Since the opening of the site, there has been occasional protest from the Jewish community in response to the Jewishness blended into the Christian theme (Canedy 2001). For instance, rabbis in the Orlando area have made claims that the mix of Jewish and Christian themes and theology distorts Jewish history and that the theme-park setting trivializes the religion (Brabant 2001).

Through a variety of data based upon pilgrimage, sacred geography, passion plays, miracles, and relics, the thesis of this ethnography is divided into two parts. Due to the characteristics of the Holy Land Experience, the site can be considered a medieval, modern day, North American, Christian pilgrimage site. The second hypothesis involves the presence of Jewish heritage intertwined into the clear Christian theme. In other words, Christianity's centralization on Jesus Christ is the obvious premise nevertheless Jewish traditional relevance

is equally present throughout performances, origin, and sacred geography to the extent that the Judaic aura provides a near equal basis while contributing positive meaning towards Israeli culture.

A Biblical Theme Park

Marvin Rosenthal founded the Zion's Hope Ministry in 1989.¹ Born Jewish, Mr. Rosenthal converted to Christianity at the age of sixteen. Since his mid twenties, Mr. Rosenthal has been a Minister of Baptist root, dedicated to the Evangelical devotion towards Christ, and has given special attention to reaching other Jews. Through prayer, encouragement from others, and Exodus 3:11-18, Mr. Rosenthal claims the Lord clearly led him to Orlando to begin Zion's Hope. Even though the city was not his first choice to start his new project, he trusted his faith and began preparation for the establishments.

After purchasing a piece of land directly off of I-4 in downtown Orlando and working directly out of his home, Mr. Rosenthal started the independent ministry called Zion's Hope. The Holy Land Experience followed as the second part of the Zion's Hope ministry and was open for business in 2001. This section was designed for the public to observe Christian values in accordance with historical Jewish influence and tradition through the use of live performances, replicas, and biblical artifacts. The Messianic Jewish practices within the Zion's Hope ministry provide foundation

for the generalized, Evangelical education given at the site.

Today, when driving down I-4, one sees a large white and gold temple that differs from modern buildings yet, the uniqueness being somewhat expected in the tourist capital of the world. One of the worlds leading independent entertainment design and technology companies, ITEC was responsible for the design and production of the total Holy Land Experience project ("Zion's Hope" N.A.). The 16 million dollar project is located on 15 acres adjacent to Interstate Four, across from a shopping complex, near Universal Studios, and five miles southwest of downtown Orlando.

At first glance, the Holy Land Experience seems to be another tourist attraction in Orlando. A "Biblically" inspired park which, share many characteristics of other parks such as, thirty- dollar day passes, monopolized food stands, and gift shops. The themes behind each of the Orlando attractions differentiate one park from the other: Killer Whales, Mickey Mouse, cinema production, and now Jesus. Further similarities between the Holy Land Experience and other Orlando themed attractions would be the replication of historic monuments or sites, souvenirs, costumes, and the live performances.

To certain Christian believers such as the staff and most of the guests, the site can hold a different meaning that not only distinguishes itself from theme parks, but from customary ministries as well. The complex includes a biblical museum, an auditorium, performance stages, and an indoor model of 66 A.D Jerusalem, gift shops, food stands, and a small restaurant. The Christian theme of the park is represented by several factors which include historical biblical reenactments performed by the staff,

¹ Marvin Rosenthal is the founder and head of this organization. Because he is a public figure, it is neither possible nor necessary to control his identity. All other names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

replicas of ancient monumental sites, and collections of authentic, deep-rooted, Christian writings. According to the published literature of Holy Land Experience, the purpose of the 'theme park' is, "to communicate the unchanging message of saving grace through faith in Christ alone. But while our message is fixed, our methods of communicating that message are flexible."

After arriving through the gates, paying a five dollar parking fee, then an additional \$34.00 for a day pass, the visitor is greeted with "Shalom" by an employee dressed as an imagined denizen of Jerusalem two thousand years ago. Upon entrance, passes are exchanged for the day's schedule of events. On the back of each brochure is an abstract on the central ideas behind the attraction that states:

'At the Holy Land Experience, we aim to demonstrate the living truths of the Scripture in innovative ways through state-of-the-art biblical exhibits, dynamic musical and dramatic performances, and specialized tours of our Jerusalem model. The Holy Land Experience is a living, biblical museum, designed to give you a glimpse of what life was like during the time of Jesus Christ. As a not-for-profit Christian ministry, our hope is that you will grow in the knowledge of God, be challenged in your continuing search for the truth of God, and be encouraged in your faith.'

Holy Land Experience as a Pilgrimage Site

A broad definition of a pilgrimage is a journey to a sacred center where bonding to meaning can take place, where people can be instructed and empowered for work and witness (Zahniser 1997:154). Victor Turner defines four types of pilgrimage. One is the prototypical pilgrimage, established by the founder or early follower of an historical religion. Second being the archaic pilgrimage, a blend of pious influence, which has mythical or unknown origins. Third, is a medieval Christian phenomenon that involves the production and visitation of elaborate, symbolic shrines. Last is the Modern Pilgrimage, characterized by a high devotional tone and personal piety on the part of pilgrims destined for sites of miracles and visions (Zahniser 1997:143-4). Working with the characteristics of each type of pilgrimage rather than the implied historical eras, the Holy Land Experience is best understood as a medieval pilgrimage site with some characteristics of modern pilgrimage.

A Place Set Apart

The Holy Land Experience can be best thought of as a pilgrimage site. According to Arnold Van Gennep's *Stages of Pilgrimage*, for the individual, the pilgrimage begins with a desire of mental separation from his or her ordinary life, identity, and social role (1960). The person has started on a path separate from socio cultural aspects he or she is accustomed to due to a form of sanctified reasoning. The mental changes one experiences can result in the beginning of a physical movement or journey. This search for a calling leads to

a physical separation in the form of a journey.

Separation begins with the individual's decision to leave his or her known surroundings and making a physical journey to the site. Clearly, not all visitors to the Holy Land Experience go for the same reason. Based on several interviews, observation, and guest feedback, it is safe to conclude that the origin of preparation for the trip is centered on variations of pious reasoning. This assumption is partly based upon observation of consistent church groups and several of the visitors who are often seen wearing Christian themed t-shirts. Therefore, it is possible the pious theme of the Holy Land Experience was an original central motive in the pilgrim's decision for participating in the journey. Guest feedback further supports the theory of original pious separation motives. Regardless of positive or negative remarks about their experience at the site, the guests' comments focus primarily on religious concerns.

In relation to a pilgrim and the Holy Land Experience, the first occurrence within the Separation stage is when the visitor generates a will to visit the center after receiving initial knowledge about the site. According to interviews, a majority of this knowledge is achieved by word of mouth through Christian subcultures or congregations. For the ministry, advertising has been low priority. However, several Orlando hotels, visitor centers, and tourist packets have fliers on the park. Promotional material is limited to the company emblem and directions. The reliance on a word of mouth technique has resulted in a surprising number of pilgrims who have traveled both nationally and internationally. One example of worldly

travel is a letter received by Guest Services that reads,

We came all the way from
Norway to visit this
wonderful place. We are
thinking back with
thankfulness and joy on
the great day we had
together with you all! It
was a great inspiration in
our work for the Lord in
our part of the world.

Location, directions, finances, and additional physical attributes blend with the mental reasoning of curiosity and/or possible religious learning that creates the pilgrim's final decision to visit. The beginning of the separation stage for this pilgrimage site can vary in accordance to when and where the pilgrim initially decided to make the journey. Due to the site's location right off the interstate in the tourist capital of the world, it is difficult to determine whether the pilgrim specifically decided to make the journey to the site before reaching Orlando or if the decision was based off of a flier he or she may have picked up at a tourist information booth. Regardless, the separation stage consists of the physical journey to the park. It is irrelevant as to whether the pilgrim made the initial decision in Michigan, Norway, or from an Orlando hotel.

The distance traveled by the pilgrim can hold a degree of value in his or her search for stronger faith due to the journey itself symbolizing the pilgrim's willpower for faith-based knowledge. The journey made by the pilgrim to a sacred site symbolizes the commitment and personal sacrifice needed to improve one's pious status. Traditionally, the journey itself marked the bravery in

making a pilgrimage through unknown territory while facing possible hardships encountered while traveling. This aspect of the separation process is widely accepted as a characteristic of medieval pilgrimages due to the potential dangers a pilgrim may have once faced while traveling on foot.

To visit the Holy Land Experience, one has to consider the distance covered in either the air, or on the busy highways into the possibly unfamiliar territory. A large majority of visitors to the Holy Land Experience tend to be elderly; therefore, it may be more inconvenient for them to make the physical journey. The greater the difficulty in traveling can translate into greater personal determination for increasing his or her religious faith and status. Nonetheless, to go to the Holy Land Experience is much less difficult than a trip to Israel.

Entering the parking area marks the last stage of separation. At this point of the journey, one has not officially stepped into the sacred perimeter. A contrast can be made to a medieval pilgrim walking up to the opening of St. Patrick's purgatorial cave (Zaleski: 1985). Although one may be in the vicinity of the sacred, the transition to the liminal phase has not yet been reached.

Liminality and Transformation

Liminality, refers to an in between stage of social status for the individual. He passes through a realm of dimension that has few if any of the attributes to the past or coming state; he is betwixt and between all familiar lines of classification (Turner 1978: 2). Liminality is the climax of the journey; it includes reaching the grounds and participation in the ritual. During the

journey, the possibilities of coming across danger and temptations are present; this stage eventually becomes more of a test. It is the most important stage of the pilgrimage process because it consists of the abilities of mental transformation for the individual. The liminal stage includes the emotions upon arrival to the destination as well as introduction to rituals relating to the site. At this phase, previous thought and behavior are subject to revision when unique manners of new possibilities become available (Turner 1978: 2). The liminal phase contains the emotional experiences that lead to inner self- transformation and preparation for reentry into the profane world.

Liminality is a characteristic in the separation from secular society to becoming involved with the ritual practices on sacred ground. This allows opportunity for one to experience a level of inner-self transformation to prepare for reentry into the profane world. The process of undergoing self- discovery is made on an individual basis, which has the ability to exercise a power of thought over action. It is through ritual that differentiates a pilgrimage from other types of social transition. The working of the human imagination allows the timeless, mythic qualities, and scarcity of a pilgrimage to take place (Campo 1998: 2).

It is possible for a pilgrim to immediately make the inner faith- based transition through accepting the physical atmosphere of the Holy Land Experience as being sacred ground. Due to the strong Evangelical beliefs within this subculture, the replications of symbolic pious sites that Jesus was directly involved with can be treated as sacred symbolism. Several of these structures are used for passion dramas and ministry. Both types of performances are structured around

traditional Protestant beliefs and practices (Albanese 1999:152). Pious teaching takes place within the area of the symbolic replicas. In considering the physical attributes of sacred symbolism and pious teachings, the structures alone can influence one's cognitive and conscious mind frame.

The instant the pilgrim passes through the gate into the site, the liminal stage begins. This transition creates a distance from the profane world of home while entering the sacred threshold of the park. It is at this point where the individual is in between two realms, the secular and the profane worlds (Turner 1969).

After one's indulgences are accepted as gratitude, the individual enters sacred ground and is surrounded by artificial, A.D 66 Jerusalem market.² This atmosphere is detailed with Roman Guards grouped together in a corner, and peasant musicians playing instruments such as the *oud*, the African *d'jembe*, tambourines, and the gourd. The atmosphere of the entrance is enhanced by three sand colored, artificial mud-brick buildings, built in a position to somewhat isolate the area from the rest of the site. The buildings stand about twenty feet tall and encompass an open courtyard of an estimated fifty-foot perimeter. To enter the park, one must go through a gated section of the guest services building. Upon entrance, directly to the left (north) is the restroom building (also mud brick design to blend with the ancient Jerusalem theme). Looking east is a building containing two gift shops with canopies extending over the entrances.

² The term 'Indulgence' is used to draw a parallel between the payment used for admission into the Holy Land Experience and the medieval Catholic practice of selling indulgences. In either setting, the indulgence represents a monetary payment for religious gratification.

In the middle of the courtyard are two, rustic benches and box crates, positioned to enhance the scenery of an arid street market.

Three reasons make the Calvary Garden Tomb the center and official introduction to the Holy Land Experience. It is the first symbolic exhibit visitors come across upon entrance to the site, it can be considered the center of the park due to its actual location, and third, it is where a majority of the live presentations take place, though most importantly, the passion drama.

Due to an overwhelming Christian focus, the death of Christ is a play that symbolizes the central teachings of Jesus through the resurrection. Traditionally, Passion plays and the focus on the resurrection are aspects of Catholic practice. It is interesting that Passion dramas provide for the centrality of the Protestant site.

The exhibit is made of a lower dirt floor stage with a large, sand-colored, artificial rock wall, being the central piece of the exhibit. There is a rounded off entrance in the middle of the wall roughly eight feet high. This is meant to resemble the entrance to the tomb where Christ was buried. To the left of the opening is a circular, artificial stone with an estimated eight-foot diameter. Two permanent wooden crosses are positioned at the top of a grassy, 20-foot hill directly above the tomb. Tropical vegetation, sporadic palm trees, and a variety of plants surround the exhibit completely. This is the site of the daily Passion play.

When watching a Passion play, one is facing southwest. To the right of the Garden Tomb is an external exhibit of the Kumar Caves. This exhibit is made of artificial boulders of an orange sand color in the shape of a mound roughly 30-feet high. There is a larger, more natural

looking cave-opening about ten feet high, facing north. A wooden staircase leads to a platform alongside the exhibit that stands about five feet high and faces northwest. The Kumar Caves replica is not used for any performances specifically, though at times singers will use the stair-case while a show is being held at the Garden Tomb.

Moving east along the path, the entrance to The Plaza of Nations (Temple of the Great King) appears as the new exhibit is traced into a clockwise circular direction. The entrance to the structure consists of two, fifteen-foot high, Roman style, white marble columns. For the audience, there are rows of wooden chairs estimated to seat roughly 250 viewers. The chairs face a stage in which the backdrop is a six- story, white with gold outlined replica of Herod's temple. This is another stage for outdoor musical dramas and is also used for additional performances throughout the day. This structure was replicated to one-third of the original scale of the actual Herod's Temple.

At this point along the physical path of the liminal phase, the visitor has been exposed to modeled biblical structures within an ancient Jerusalem time setting. Furthermore, it is likely the pilgrim has had the opportunity to view at least two musical biblical dramas. The pilgrim has the option to continue the liminal stage of further teachings by moving deeper into the property. After viewing the musical drama at the Plaza of Nations, a visitor can walk to the left (heading east) of the stage and exit onto the path that eventually connects to a second exit from the Plaza area. While on this path, one passes the Oasis Palms Café to their right and two snack stands on the left. Continuing on, a large pond with a single fountain in the middle is

seen on the left. On the opposite side of the pond facing the park, the landscaped greenery spells, "HE IS RISEN". The walkway turns from east to north with the Shofar Auditorium on one's right (east) side and the pond to the left (west).

Outlined in landscaped trees and plants, the Shofar Auditorium is a two to three story building made of orange colored sheetrock material. Moving north, the building sections off into a part shaped like a hexagon. The entrance/exit to this section opens into a room with a scaled model of ancient Jerusalem, which blends into a large gift shop. The auditorium resembles the interior of a modern church designed to fit about four hundred people.

Once outside, the path continues in a north- eastern direction toward the building called the Scriptorium. Although this three to four story building resembles the same texture and color of the Shofar Auditorium, the copper-colored roof is made of several arched dome shapes. Overall, the structure gives the appearance of a building composed of smaller sections that have been added on to one another. Again, with the exception of the entrance, the building is surrounded by well-kept landscape. This building is used as a museum of ancient and biblical texts that date over 2000 years old. The audio-directed tour is an hour long, which ends with a dramatic Evangelical message. The tour finishes with mechanical doors opening into a gift shop.

Throughout the visit, the pilgrim has been exposed to a variety of pious teachings by partaking in a guide of historical artifacts, Protestant sermons, live performances, symbolic structure, and ground level religious conversation with staff members. Whether the pilgrim experiences all of these transitional tools

is irrelevant. The important concept to consider is that the Holy Land Experience provides a variety of educational methods to further the expansion of one's Christian faith and understanding. The Holy Land Experience attempts to religiously affect the pilgrim's life for return to the secular world. What is interesting to consider at this point is the physical layout of the entire site. The reason this is important is that through the park's arrangement one can complete the liminal phase based upon acknowledgement of the structural symbolism.

Ground Level Ministry

The opportunity for the pilgrim to interact with Old and New Testament characters provides the chance to learn and share pious beliefs on a personal level rather than through observation and lectures. Though not all of the staff are ordained ministers, the majority attest that they are deeply involved in a continuous search for God. I have been told repeatedly in interviews that the staff does not intend to push any religious values on to anyone; rather, they are open to discuss fundamental beliefs with whomever willing. The opportunity to openly converse with the staff provides an additional option in the learning process for the pilgrim. This is meant to result in ground level, personal communication with a member of a subculture whom is very much involved in his or her religious beliefs.

For example, in an article in the Jerusalem Gold Quarterly, a Holy Land Experience staff member tells of an incident where a young woman (visitor) was obviously having a bad day when all of a sudden Jesus came out carrying the cross during the Calvary Garden Tomb

drama. The staff member turned to the guest and said,

Jesus loves you so much.
He did that for us. That's
how much He loves us.
The young girl started
crying, so the staff
member recommended she
go watch the passion
drama, which she did.
When the girl returned,
the staff member asked
"Would you like to know
this Christ?" The teenager
replied, "yes", so the two
joined hands and prayed.
The article ends with and
her life is now forever
changed. Please pray that
doors be continually
opened for us to share
Christ's love as we
minister to our guests
(Jerusalem Gold Quarterly,
January-March 2004).

According to the article, this example can provide evidence that a major goal of the Holy Land Experience is to minister in a variety of ways while attempting to make life changes in the visitors. A life change was claimed to been made from to the specific drama and conversation. This further supports the liminal theory in that certain social tools were used within a sacred site to allow a personal transition.

The musicians in the Street Market interact with the visitors by talking about their instruments or songs. Guests are regularly invited to try them out. The structural settings, characters, and music combine to form somewhat of a transitional tool from the modern secular world to the time of Christ.

There is the possibility of beginning the transition through conversing with any of the staff during any point of the visit regardless of whether an employee is in costume or uniform. This includes everyone from an actor or actress, to snack stand operators, custodians, and possibly Mr. Rosenthal.

One commonality of all the staff I have interviewed agreed that a benefit of working at the Holy Land Experience is the opportunity to share their Christian faith with anyone openly willing to listen. For example, one respondent said "I'm being used as God's servant to minister here (Holy Land Experience)." This example reinforces the willingness of the staff to impact anyone's life by sharing and teaching their religious beliefs. Therefore, if the staff is eager to converse about his or her religion, it is possible a visitor may begin the inner transition of personal devotion or the challenges in increasing his or her faith.

Based on my analysis, the staff members are in costume to further create a 'biblical' atmosphere to allow the likeliness of being approached by visitors because of their reenacting role. Other staff members, such as food services and retail sales usually wear an embroidered, Holy Land Experience polo shirt with khaki pants. Though this particular dress may not bring as much attention to the individual as an actor's uniform may, it does accentuate to the purified sacredness of the site.

All employees have the opportunity to engage in conversation with guests. Although there may not always be time for long discussion, there have been times when employees have had deep conversation with guests. In an interview with Bruno, a Cart Runner, he gives an example of his views on the importance of guest communication.

"I am able to share my faith to everyone around me because everyone has the general beliefs. When looking around at this puzzle of religion to a history of beliefs in faith, I find it refreshing.

Knowing that people are learning about their faith while being able to share their beliefs with others as well as Him (God). The sharing can act as a serious relationship towards God while allowing guests to become more motivated in their faith. The Holy Land Experience is part of a God based puzzle. I work here for a purpose, not [just] a paycheck. I feel it is God's plan for me."

The Animal Caretaker is a unique position which, combines historical reenactment and social contact with the guests. He attempts to dress as a Middle Eastern Shepard and is usually seen caring for the animals or playing a musical instrument. His daily activities consist of two main tasks. The responsibility for the animals; which involves cleaning, feeding, and walking them throughout the day and contact with the guests. The stables are located behind the audience at the Garden Tomb Stage. Brett has the opportunity to interact with guests on a casual, time allowing, level. His normal greeting to people is 'Shalom'. He uses the animals in beginning conversation to 'break the ice'. This method allows for guests to relax and feel comfortable talking to him about whatever they desire. There are many

times his conversations have led to sharing the gospel, religious views, educating one another on Christianity, and creating further interests within their faith. All the while, Brett is receiving a form of religious education through being able to interact with guests whose comments may influence his pious thoughts in some way.

Medieval Liminality

A major part of the liminal process at the Holy Land Experience is within the live performances. As well, the transformational tool of stage performances was a common medieval pilgrimage characteristic. Victor Turner describes Social Drama as the experiential matrix from which the many genres of cultural performance, beginning with redressive ritual and juridical procedures, and eventually including oral and literary narrative, have been generated (1982: 78). Turner continues to state that social drama is our native way of manifesting ourselves to ourselves and, of declaring where power and meaning lie and how they are distributed (1982: 78). Therefore a social drama within a culture can symbolize a tool society can use to direct the individual into an accepted direction of belief. In relation to the pilgrimage process, the social drama takes place in the liminal stage. This is due to the behavioral and thought reinforcement one may experience from the dramas, which works to fulfill the broader cognitive transition of the in between stage. The art of the dramas are focused on central themes used to enforce the general beliefs of the performers.

In relation to the Holy Land Experience, the performances include a variety of staff participation due to the

diversity of job positions involved in maintaining the biblical Jerusalem setting or theme. The performances at the Holy Land Experience consist of specific historical accounts that center around the Gospel with somewhat of a interrelation to Judaic history and tradition.

Although there are a variety of performances conducted, the climax of the visit to the Holy Land Experience is designed to be in the musical dramas. The stages that these performances are held include the Calvary's Garden Tomb and the Plaza of Nations. These two stages attempt to symbolize a pure form of the actual historical sites. The plays consist of several actors, actresses and singers. Some of the regularly acted roles include Jesus, Mary, Marcus, Roman guards, and peasants.

The actors and actresses perform dramas and musicals based on the messages of the Gospel. For example, the performances I observed at the *Calvary Garden Tomb* were the Passion plays. The first scene is of Christ carrying the cross along a path that divides through the audience. The Roman guards eventually lead him to the top of the stage where two permanent crosses are standing upright. Jesus is attached to a middle cross, which at this time is lying horizontal at the top of the hill. Soon afterwards, the cross is lifted to an upright position. At this point, Christ is on the cross, centered at the top of the stage, marking the climax of both the musical performance and the acts.

Throughout the play, biblical characters relevant to the gospel surround Jesus. This act goes alongside continuous vocal performances by characters dressed in Middle Eastern peasant garb. The singers are positioned at the higher levels of the sides of the stage, allowing for Jesus and the guards to remain center.

Their position permits a blend into the crucifixion scene yet, separated in order to narrate the Gospel to go along with the performance.

One telling element of the Holy Land Experience Passion play is the complete absence of the role of Jewish leaders in the crucifixion. This is marked contrast to Mel Gibson's *The Passion of The Christ*, which many critics feared would spark anti Jewish sentiments (Waxman 2004). The conspicuous absence of characters representing Jewish leaders in the Passion play contrasts with other dramas in the park. Moreover, between dramas Pharisee characters wander the site interacting with guests. The Jewish absence out of the play can be seen as a deliberate attempt to edit them out of the crucifixion story.

Through a variety of transitional tools used within the Holy Land Experience, the accepting pilgrim has the opportunity to experience a greater level in his or her faith while receiving pious knowledge from within the physical boundaries of the site. Once the pilgrim is ready to depart, it is the intention of the Holy Land Experience that the pilgrim leaves with greater pious knowledge of Christianity and a higher level of personal faith to be fully prepared for entrance into the secular world. For the pilgrim visiting the Holy Land Experience, the liminal stage begins and ends by passing through the gates of the site.

Bringing Back the Boon

Reintegration is the final stage where the subject is reintroduced into society with a new role and a newly acquired status. It is in this stage that the return to ordinary life takes place with added experience and knowledge gained

from the journey. The pilgrim enters into a new, deeper level of existence than he or she had known prior to the trip. In addition to bringing back lessons learned, the pilgrim may bring back souvenirs, relics, and icons. The relics are subject to become valuable to the individual and possibly hold importance within their culture.

In regards to the reintegration process, the primary goal the Holy Land Experience hopes to achieve for the guests is life changing experiences and lessons learned in reference to bringing one closer to the pronounced Christian faith. The visitors exit the site through the Jerusalem Street Market. Therefore, one has to retrace their steps on the same paths they used that took them through the visit. This is important for three reasons: One, this allows the pilgrim to see for a second time the sites where pious education or changes within oneself were made; thus relating to the activity that surrounds the geography. Two, the retracing allows the opportunity to view performances that were missed the first time through and/or the chance to see the performance again. Lastly, in order to leave the Holy Land Experience, one has to exit through the main entrance, located within the Jerusalem Street Market. Therefore, the opportunity to obtain relics being sold within the gift shops is likely.

During the middle ages, commodities from pilgrimage sites became a popular item for pilgrims to come in contact with. As societies' demand for pious relics increased, so did the commodities and the definition of what one is. In the passage below, Turner briefly describes this medieval transition in the meaning and social value of relics.

“Conceptual and institutional structuration of penitential pilgrimage prepared the way for the demise of the pilgrimage system in its high medieval form, for it no longer represented *communitas*, social anti-structure. Even at the folk level, pilgrimage became encrusted with customs denying its original spirit. Religious “conmen” like Chaucer’s Pardoner sold indulgences and relics by the bagful. The Crusades opened Europe to a spate of relics from the Holy Land, with much reduplication—St. John the Baptist’s head, countless phials of Virgin’s milk, parts of her girdle and veil, portions of her hair, and enough pieces of the “true Cross” (1978: 196).

In Turner’s description of the origin of relics in Western Christendom, he describes how the relics became culturally valuable due to the belief that the relics from a sacred site were capable of miraculous power. This became a wide spread notion of thought as Turner described, the attribution of magic powers to relics; they became fetishes operating by principals of sympathetic and contagious magic rather than serving as vehicles of religious and ethical ideas (1978:197).

Turner continues in saying that relics were made to be important through advertising. The symbolic value of the relic has remained throughout Western history into modern times. Though there

have been alterations and expanded varieties to what is considered to be an object of religious value, the idea of obtaining an object from a sacred site is based upon a foundation of medieval ideals.

During the middle ages, the collection of relics became the most sought after souvenirs (Davidson 1993: 64). Reasons for the obsession of possessing relics varied. The spiritual benefits of owning a sacred object worked to the individual’s favor by symbolically implying his or her devoted level of piety. This is to say that the pilgrim used the physical object as proof of his or her journey to the sacred site. In regard to the Holy Land Experience, a t-shirt with the Holy Land Experience emblem can symbolize the visit, thus being defined as a relic from the site.

Religious commodities can be viewed as the process by which the social economic market is being utilized by religious ideology. In other words, this process turns piety into a commodity, religion becomes something that can be bought and sold (Lukens-Bull 2004:9). This is a universal characteristic of pilgrimage sites of both medieval and modern eras. For example, contemporary Indonesian pilgrims to the Grand Mosque bring back a number of items including “zani-zani wuri”, praying beads, slides of the Hajj and even view masters (Lukens-Bull 2004). Though some of these items do not represent traditional religious icons, they do symbolize specific religious virtues of the pilgrim as well as the pious journey of the modern world. In regards to the Holy Land Experience, a parallel can be made when considering the toy swords and children books being sold throughout the site’s gift shops.

From a secular viewpoint, relic trade for economic reason is another

aspect of the pilgrimage process that has continued on. In medieval times, this trade proved to be prosperous through using religious motives and ideas. As a not-for-profit Christian organization, the Holy Land Experience technically does not make revenue off of what is sold, however I have been reminded several times through interviews that the Holy Land Experience 'is a business'. Due to a number of advertisements for objects sold through the ministry via mail as well as the number of items sold on site, it is difficult to assume there is no profit being made from the relics. I mention this because in comparing beliefs on medieval relics to modern relics, there seems to be the lasting question as to what the genuine purpose of items sold at a sacred site are; miraculous, pious status, or financial gain? Regardless, value of these objects is determined by origin and authenticity; similar to what decides the prices of cherished imports today.

Though there are no authentic relics on the premises, medieval, relic-like items are present within the replicated Calvary Garden Tomb. Almost daily, visitors line up outside of the Tomb in order to view the interior of what resembles the site of Jesus' burial. On the inside of the replica, there is a sheet to look placed upon the site where Jesus was assumed to have been placed. The objects within the replica as well as the Tomb itself represent a degree of sacredness seen especially through the interests of the visitors.

As relics are concerned, the Holy Land Experience can fit into either the medieval pilgrimage or the modern theme park description for two reasons. Depending on how one looks at the specific site determines the items value. For example, from a secular point of view, there are gifts being sold for

economical interests much like the reasons items are sold at Disney World. In a religious perspective, these items may hold a symbolic value regardless of what the item is. The symbolism is in regards to the effort one made to take time, pay indulgences, and travel. To have the opportunity to receive additional pious knowledge works toward increasing one's faith for his or her life long pilgrimage.

Other reasons to consider are the social status changes the pilgrim may have access to upon returning home. The relic allows one to give something of spiritual value to their permanent religious organization, thus improving ones relationship with the church. A direct medieval comparison would be a pilgrim who brought a bottle of dust collected from a pilgrimage site and donated it to his or her local congregation. Today, one may bring a religious educational book or a imported object from Jerusalem back from the Holy Land Experience to his or her congregation. Apart from the time period, both motives for bringing back relics to the pious community hold similar purposes.

Miraculous value can be related to the Holy Land Experience through relics as well as the general existence of the site. As previously noted, medieval sacred relics originated in value due to a belief that the object held spiritual powers. Relics were thought to heal the sick as well as spiritually benefit the individual. The relics sold at the Holy Land Experience are not known to have these similar powers, though what is sold can symbolize the site where a specific type of religious education is taught. In reference to the Jewish imports, these goods symbolize sacred objects from the authentic Holy Land. The items are

designed to reemphasize specific religious beliefs (Starrett 1995).

The pilgrim of similar pious thought may consider the Holy Land Experience a miraculous creation due to its ability to openly demonstrate those beliefs. A letter written to Zion's Hope reads, 'I want to thank you for the wonderful job that you (through Christ) have accomplished with the HLE.' A miracle in Christian culture is known to work through Christ; therefore, this individual is praising the ideals of the Holy Land Experience in miraculous terms due to the work of the Holy Land Experience being done through Jesus.

Turner states one commonality of all pilgrimage sites is they are believed to be places where miracles once happened, still happen, and may happen again (1978:6). The anthropological definition of a miracle or the revivification of faith are everywhere regarded as rewards for undertaking long, not infrequently perilous, journeys and for having temporarily given up not only the cares but also the rewards of ordinary life (1978:6). According to this definition, the miracle can be a reward for one's faith. Therefore, for the active Protestant Christian community, the Holy Land Experience can symbolize the miracle clearly by its physical presence and its ability to publicly demonstrate specific beliefs.

By the time the pilgrim is ready to return to secular society, there are three goals, set by the Holy Land Experience to be accomplished for successful reintegration. One, an increase in one's faith of evangelical fundamental beliefs; though the pilgrim is not required to be a believer of this Christian branch, the hopes that the individual will recognize goodness and truth through the particular teachings is an intention. The second,

being a broad education in Christianity and lastly, a better understanding of the Judaic role in Christianity, particularly with Jesus Christ. Through the absence of Jewish traditional belief toward Christ allows the possibility to reconsider teachings of Jewish attitude toward beliefs in Christ.

Medieval Versus Modern Pilgrimage

The Industrial and Scientific Revolutions are what separated the medieval and modern pilgrimage process due to the causes of overall transition in human society and cultures (Turner 1978:172). The main shift has been in regard to beliefs about the supernatural. Given the emergence of rational explanations, pilgrimage sites shifted their pious dedication to supernatural phenomenon. Through changes in thought concerning the religious paranormal, definitions of terms such as "apparition," "vision," and "dream" are comparably different within the medieval era as opposed to modern day. Because the Catholic Church is an institution committed by Scriptural belief in the reality of supernatural order, the Church cannot ignore established phenomenal beliefs. The Church continues to recognize the supernatural potentials of God intervening in everyday life, yet a supernatural occurrence will only be an accepted explanation once all other possible explanations have been tested by the Church (Turner 1978:173).

Throughout the middle ages, belief in mystic or paranormal activity was more commonly accepted in both religious and secularized settings. European medieval pilgrimage sites were believed to have attributes such as mystic caves and healing centers. Santiago de Compostela was a major pilgrimage site

in the early ninth century partly because of the mystical beliefs of where the apostle James was buried. Accordingly, the burial site had been discovered as a result of supernatural lights in the sky revealing the location to a Shepard. Soon afterwards, the site began to attract visitors. In one example, while visiting the site, Charlemagne reported to of had a vision of St. James telling him to free his remains from pagan lands (Davidson 1993: 147).

Turner states that an “apparition” is a supernatural vision that is bodily, or visible. A “vision” includes not only apparitions but also “imaginative visions,” usually produced in the imagination during sleep. There is also a category of “intellectual visions,” in which the mind perceives a spiritual truth without any sensory image (1978: 173). Though the modern Church does not disregard a holy message or spiritual blessings granted by God, it does recognize scientific explanations of cognitive psychology and the possibilities that the ‘supernatural’ occurrence may have been an action of the subconscious.

Another attribute to the foundation of medieval pilgrimage sites was the replication of a holy structure or structures. This practice was adopted from a post-Islamic trend of replicating or “replacing” the lost shrines of Palestine and other parts of the near East. Scattered throughout Europe are several replicated sites of symbolic structures of the Holy Land’s Christian relations. In England for instance, shrines such as the Holy House were built in place to where the supernatural event occurred.³ Almost immediately these shrines became

famous centers for pilgrimage (Turner 1978:175).

Medieval building methods of holy replicas appear to follow similar patterns. Though precise measurements were used in some of the architecture, exact building replication was uncommon. In many situations, the materials and measurements do not correspond with the original structure. For instance, the original Loreto building of Nazareth was known to be made out of limestone, mortar, and cedar with measurements of thirty-two feet long, thirteen feet wide, and eighteen feet wide. According to measurements recorded in the fifteenth century, the English replica was built out of wood and measured roughly twenty-three feet long by thirteen feet wide. The Italian replicated shrine of the Holy House was twenty-eight feet long by thirteen feet wide (Turner 1978:177-80). It is probable that an exact building replica was not the intention but rather the symbolism of honoring a holy structure.

The contrast between Victor Turner’s research on medieval pilgrimage sites and the Holy Land Experience is that the Holy Land Experience has similar attributes to the medieval pilgrimage site in origin, but mostly comparison is within the replicated structures, and an attempt to create a pure or perfect form of what is represented. As previously mentioned, Marv Rosenthal decided to establish the Zion’s Hope ministry in Orlando based upon the notion that ‘God clearly led him there’. The message from God to Mr. Rosenthal can be related to Turner’s definition of apparition. Though supernatural events were both socially accepted as well as the deciding factor in certain religious activity, it is not to say that belief and acceptance of these events have dragged

³ The A.D.1291 Legend of Loreto is about the Holy House of Nazareth, which was known for it’s miraculous appearance first in England and then Italy during the eleventh century

on into modern pilgrimage qualities in close enough comparison that the origin of modern supernatural reliance has clear ties to medieval social beliefs.

Perhaps the most significant connection to the Holy Land Experience as having medieval traits is within the physical replicas of what has been decided upon by the Zion's Hope ministry to represent Christian symbolism. On the property, there are replications of some of the historical sites within Jerusalem such as the Calvary Garden Tomb and Herod's Temple. None of the structures were built to scale in terms of measurement or material although the attempt to reproduce particular 'pure' design tends to be more accurate in some cases.

Jerusalem as It Should Be

By going through the layout of the Holy Land Experience, the pilgrim is surrounded by biblical structural replicas within a garden of lush tropical vegetation, clean walkways, and friendly staff in costume, ready to converse. The air is clean and the sounds range from instrumental middle-eastern recordings to an outdoor performance. In other words, the geography clearly represents an ancient Jerusalem that not only acts as an alternative to visiting Israel, but symbolizes a Jerusalem in a pure, true form. In other words, the Holy Land Experience not only serves as a contained site that has become sacred, but represents an *imago mundi*, or a microcosmic model of how the world (Jerusalem) should be (Eliade 1958). The pilgrim is encompassed by a Jerusalem atmosphere of highlighted biblical attractions, safety, comfort, and cleanliness. In a way, this site can offer more than an alternative to traveling to

Israel. Moreover, does this site offer a better experience than actual 'real life' Jerusalem in order to put forth a subconscious message of support for the state?

Through both observation and interviews, Jewish heritage is emphasized by the staff in a variety of methods, which include dress, stage names, and occasionally attempts at an Israeli-American accent. Although I am unaware of any mandatory 'Jewish' prerequisites of the staff, there appears to be a general interest and attraction to Jewish culture by the employees. From the staff member's ancient Judaic personification, the historic Jewish structure replica's, the themed food, and the Jewish heritage representation throughout performances, there is equally a Hebrew influence on the visitors as there is Christian.

Biblical sites at the Holy Land Experience such as the Calvary Garden Tomb appear to have a pure and peaceful aura due to the park's emphasis on cleanliness and beauty. Compared to the actual site in Jerusalem, the Holy Land Experience displays their A.D. 66 interpretations as maintained, attractive shrines rather than genuinely replicating what the site may have realistically looked like or looks like today. Moreover, it is an attempt to remake a biblical Jerusalem that does not include the Wailing Wall, Dome of the Rock, or the Holy Sepulcher. The Holy Land Experience attempts to display a utopian Jerusalem versus the modern day reality through choosing only one possible burial site for Christ.

Through the use of sacred replicas, the staff's representation of biblical characters by name, accent, and dress, and a purified aura of landscape, cleanliness, and music, the Holy Land Experience can not only symbolize an

alternative to visiting modern Israel, but represents a religious utopia blended with ancient Jerusalem. If such an attempt to replicate characteristics of biblical Jerusalem was made in some ways, why then were other realistic qualities ignored? The Holy Land Experience attempts to portray certain sites, events, and atmosphere as perceived from the Bible. Therefore, this site can represent perhaps a more perfect Jerusalem than the actual Jerusalem has ever been. To further support this theory it is necessary to mention the scaled model of ancient Jerusalem, located in the Shofar Auditorium as well as the drama performances. Through a guided presentation of the model, a visitor can see what Jerusalem was believed to look like within the city walls. A drama performance can then be tied into the teachings of the model presentation to not only present a larger scaled model of a holy site within ancient Jerusalem but also to connect the site within Jerusalem to the specific Protestant virtues demonstrated.

Experience of Guests

There is criticism in regards to authenticity aspects concerning the Jerusalem theme. For example, there have been complaints of the food being mostly Arabic, certain speakers or guides not revealing precise information, and suggestions on changes that could be made to authenticate certain aspects. One letter received by Guest Services read,

God will not be mocked.
There are tons of people
making money off religion.
I had hoped this (Holy

Land Experience) would
not be another one.

Additional forms of negative feedback have been focused on the authenticity of the site's central theme, which have escalated to protests. For example, when the Holy Land Experience first opened, members of the Jewish community questioned whether the Holy Land Experience was to be a tool used to convert Judaic believers to accepting Jesus Christ under Protestant principals; therefore becoming Christian. Another inquiry from within the Jewish community was how the Judaic faith was being perceived. Is the Holy Land Experience referring to Christianity as evolutionary progress from Judaism? Although the positive feedback outweighs the negative, it is important to include both in this ethnography to provide a better understanding of the studied site and analyze what visitors observed, learned, liked, or disliked.

Conclusion

Victor Turner defined a modern pilgrimage as a movement directed with a high level of personal piety of the pilgrim whom is destined for sites of miracles and visions. Anthropologically, this definition can be used to support all of these examples within this paper in that the location has the potential to be thought of as visionary and miraculous in regards to the pilgrim's personal relation to the site that allowed the pilgrim to journey there. The liminal pilgrim's mental or physical transition through a form of ritual that alters a personal status to a level that prepares a changed, personal, presentation onto reality. Reintegration back into the profane world from these sacred sites is made possible

with the pilgrim's sacred, learned, alteration as well as the opportunity the sites allow in providing relics. The relic is part of the reintegration process that is a detailed factor yet, is included with most every North American pilgrimage site.

Modern American pilgrimage movements are somewhat comparable to the Medieval in that commercialism and forms of early tourism tends to touch upon the perimeter of the site. Throughout the Middle Ages in Western Europe, opportunity to break away from the monotonous, peasant lifestyle for pilgrimage attracted large numbers; possibly for a variety of reasons yet, in the very least, for a change in scenery. Famous sites such as Canterbury, normally had inns established along the larger paths. In other words economic gains were made off of the sacred locations. Although it is difficult to argue the same in regards to the Holy Land Experience, it is possible to say that the sacred site and the commercialization of Orlando have come into direct contact. According to Turner's theory, it would be highly possible that most Americans today may not realize when they are on pilgrimage; instead the journey is considered a vacation and themselves, tourists instead of pilgrims. The relation to medieval pilgrims would be their awareness of the pilgrimage though possibly not aware of the vacation aspect.

The staff members at the Holy Land Experience do not automatically consider the site as a place of pilgrimage. This is an interesting analysis in that many factors of the site provide ample support as a sacred place of pilgrimage in regards to a mainstream definition. The emphasis on holy figures, divine locations, pious atmosphere, sacred relics, and the religious education are some of

the characteristics, which support ideals of a traditional pilgrimage site. Perhaps the United States is on the verge of committing to a new type of pilgrimage in regards to traditional journeys to the holy land. New in one sense of site replication, yet traditional in Western pilgrimage movements to sites, which represented alternatives to visiting Jerusalem.

In regards to a North American, modern day, pilgrimage site, the Holy Land Experience holds relevance as one through the basis of VanGennep's Pilgrimage stage model. A clear liminal stage is represented through this site due to its temporary gift of the sacred Holy Land to people wishing to escape the secular times of modern day society. Although when referring to the staff at this site the reintegration stage of the model may not be clear, there is a trace of the separation phase in a mental sense as well as a clear beginning liminal phase.

The Liminal stage is where the pilgrim is involved with the activities at the ministry. It is the in between period of social status which defines the pilgrim's visit to the Holy Land Experience. Through the vast amount of ritual through education, the pilgrim is prepared to reintegrate into the norm. The Holy Land Experience has provided those resources to go into the secular world as a higher status within a particular subculture. What is unique about this particular pilgrimage site is that it is a new creation, founded on land that has no pious relation whatsoever. A traditional Western pilgrimage site in Europe may be located on sacred ground or have direct relation to a particular saint. Throughout many of the interviews I have conducted with staff members I have received the response that the Holy Land Experience is not based on these

principals. Although it is difficult to argue what the Holy Land Experience would be regarded as in Europe (due to traditional sites), the Holy Land Experience clearly can be defined as a pilgrimage with two primary reasons. One is being a replication of the actual Holy Land, which serves as an alternative to traveling to Israel, and the second being the vast forms of ministry which leave the believer with a increased level of understanding of the faith. The Holy Land Experience provides a location for those Christians who yearn for a deeper Evangelical faith. The site has allowed for a certain creation to take place in two methods. One, a general focus not necessarily on the grounds of an individual but rather, the allowance for those with similar beliefs to congregate at a site to permit a specific subculture to form. The other method is directed at the individual in a sort of subconscious process to accept Jewish culture as wonderful and pure. In other words, the pilgrim is hoped to leave the Holy Land Experience with a new, positive outlook on Judaism; through the teachings that range from viewing replicated structures to the hearing the spoken ministry, significant Jewish biblical history and a reemphasis on the culture.

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